



Rhonda Wulf
Aberdeen, South Dakota

37-years-old

**Branded Programs Manager,
DemKota Beef**

**Bachelor's degree in Animal
Science from South Dakota
State University; Master's
degree in Ranch Management
from King Ranch Institute for
Ranch Management**

Background: Raised on her family's cattle business at Morris, Minn., Wulf developed a progressive mind for the beef industry. Wulf worked at Wulf Cattle after college. Intrigued by more, she was accepted into the master's program at the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management. The experience catapulted her into a career with DemKota Beef, a start-up packing plant in Aberdeen, S.D.

Building Bridges: With a strong background in 4-H, FFA and the beef genetics/cattle feeding side of agriculture, Wulf felt well-grounded in her understanding of the beef industry. Yet, she says real perspective on the whole industry didn't come full circle for her until she attended the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, which is why she believes so strongly in a positive internship program. "It's been so rewarding to see our interns grow and watch them come into their own realizations regarding what they need to do in school and life to make a difference," she says.

Beyond Business: "I'm so boring," Wulf laughs. "I don't have exotic, exciting hobbies, but I cherish my time traveling, hanging out with friends and spending time with family. Time away from work is really important to keeping everything fresh and balanced."

Best Advice: "Even a fourth-grader can be a problem-identifier. We need to be problem-solvers." – Jerry Wulf, Rhonda's father

DRIVEN TO DISCOVER

By Amy Blum

As a student at South Dakota State University, Rhonda Wulf avoided the meat lab.

"I didn't want to work at the meat lab because I didn't think I could handle Tuesdays [harvest day]," Wulf chuckles. "Now, every day is 'Tuesday' in my work life!"

Today, Wulf plays a vital role building relationships and exploring new opportunities as the branded beef manager for DemKota Beef in Aberdeen, S.D.

Wulf's involvement with the packing plant started in September 2015—shortly after the plant's opening—in the procurement department. As the plant developed, Wulf called on experience from her time working in the family business (Wulf Cattle, Morris, Minn.) and earning her master's degree from King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management.

"It has been exciting to be with DemKota," Wulf says. "DemKota is more than a niche. We set a whole new playing field in the industry; the way we're building relationships and connecting people, especially younger consumers, to their food means real opportunity for a regional specialty beef plant."

Wulf sites open communication as a game-changer in the packer-producer-consumer triangle.

"Consumers want to know where their food comes from. Producers want to be treated fairly, and we all want to profit," she says. "At DemKota, we're creating that kind of culture by honoring the whole system and building trust between all parties."

In addition to capitalizing on the region's feeder cattle, Wulf believes in the value of a successful market for cows over 30 months old. Wulf says this under-appreciated market allows the industry to provide a cheaper protein source for consumers without sacrificing quality.

"We can fill a beef distributor's coolers from top to bottom, which means consumers at all levels can count on our quality and communication standards," Wulf says. "By building relationships directly with our suppliers and buyers, we've opened doors that honor systems within the entire beef industry while strengthening markets for everyone along the way. It's a win-win."

Embracing the Grind

Though the days are long and the work remains challenging, Wulf hasn't had any trouble staying motivated during the grind required to get a beef plant off the ground.

"I've been so intrigued by this project from the beginning," the oldest of four sisters

This industry is a relationship business; I see so much opportunity for young people who are willing to learn, to ask questions, and to proactively seek solutions.

Rhonda Wulf

says. "There are so many people who want this operation to work for South Dakota, area producers and each other. It's truly exciting to work with these folks and create something viable for the whole industry."

An area Wulf is especially excited about has little to do with harvesting beef and far more to do with cultivating relationships.

This is the first year for the DemKota Beef Internship Program. Under Wulf's leadership, eight college interns work at the beef plant in various areas but at least one hour per week is spent with a manager in each of the beef plant's various departments. Wulf believes the key to proactive problem-solving and growth both personally and professionally hinges on understanding how the whole system works together.

"In my former life, I loved 4-H and FFA, and growing up in a beef genetics/cattle feeding operation, I thought I knew the beef industry. But, it wasn't until my education at the King Ranch Institute that all the bits and pieces of the agriculture-livestock-business world started falling together," Wulf says. "Now, I have the opportunity to help kids bring it all together even earlier through practical education. These young people get to see behind the curtain and really experience the importance of each sector in the success of the whole industry."

She continues, "It's been so rewarding to see our interns grow and watch them come into their own realizations regarding what they need to do in school and life to make a difference. Their futures are bright, which is good for all of us!"

Though Wulf is dedicated to her job and passionate about the beef industry, she's not consumed by her professional role. To keep balance in her life and perspective with her work, Wulf enjoys down time.

"I don't lead a super exciting life when it comes to life outside work," she says. "But, I place a lot of value on my time away from the office. This business can be all-consuming. I believe in what we do as an industry too much to let myself get burnt out. Free time is important."